



TRAJECTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION: ANCIENT TIMES TO POST-REFORMS ERA

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INTRODUCTION

Prosperity of nations depends on retaining their competitive edge, in simple words by developing and sustaining a skilled workforce, maintaining a competitive research base and improving the dissemination of knowledge. Higher education has been seen principally as a form of investment that develops human capital, more so after human capital revolution. Another significant development is the increase in trade of both goods and services, across national borders. With the end of the cold war and collapse of the socialist economic system, two global economic systems merged into one. This paved way for an integrated global economy. Moreover, new developments in information and communication technology and telecommunications have transformed a segmented global labor market into an integrated whole. Today, the source of competitiveness in the new knowledge economy is talent and it is felt that the countries that are able to nurture talent by pursuing progressive policies in higher education would be the winners. It is the quality and size of the higher education that will differentiate a dynamic economy from a marginalized one.

Knowledge was considered as a gift in ancient India. The teacher naturally had to look to the rich and nobles and the merchants for sustenance which was gladly made available to them in the ancient times, which continued in the medieval time also. India's glorious ancient past notwithstanding, the foundation of modern higher education, was laid in the colonial era. By the turn of the twentieth, century, Abdul Kalam, presented vision for India *to emerge as a developed nation by 2020 - a developed India, a knowledge superpower*. Today, India has the third largest higher education system in the world, next only to China and the United States. The time is very opportune for India to make its transition to the knowledge economy. This paper depicts the characteristics of higher education in ancient times, expansion of higher education in independent India, and the recent trends in the post-reforms period.

SECTION 1: HIGHER EDUCATION IN ANCIENT TIMES

Education in India is of remote antiquity. The Ancient Hindu Universities of Taxila, Nalanda and Vikramshila were famous around the world. Knowledge was considered as a gift in those times. In the medieval period, state (royal) patronage was provided to higher education for administrative and religious purposes.

The East India Company did not take interest in education of Indians and adopted a neutral policy (Mukerjee, 1958; 23). During the British rule, the earliest efforts to introduce any form of education beyond the indigenous system, emanated from missionaries, private societies and individuals, whether officials or others, for various motives; and the Indian people. More importantly, in those times education was not a state responsibility in England, and except in Scotland no public money was spent on elementary education. The role of state was instrumental in starting English education. Missionary groups urged the East Indian Company to introduce English education as a means of propagating Christianity. Free Traders soon joined hand with them hoping that anglicized Indians would be potential consumers of British goods. Beginning with the establishment of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817, the system of English education had definitely taken root in the country by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The dispatch of 1854 introduced a distinct change in the educational policy of Government by encouraging the extension of education to the masses instead of confining it to the higher classes as desired by Macaulay. Hunter Commission (1882) gave careful consideration to the role of the Government and was of the view that missionary education¹ could only occupy a second place in Indian education (Bhatt & Aggarwal, 1977). The commission encouraged private efforts in the field of higher education. Consequently, there was an appreciable increase in the number of institutions and number of pupils in the fields of secondary education and higher education.

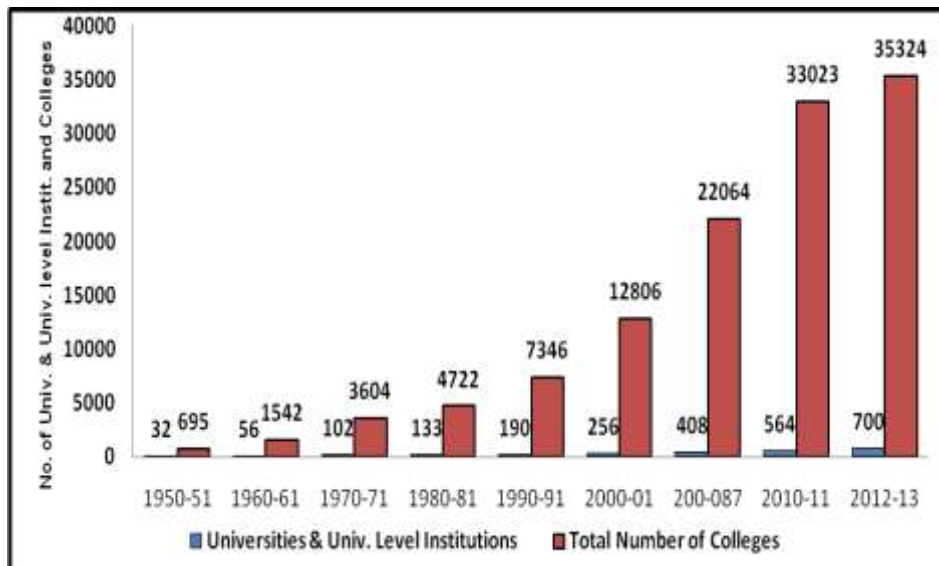
Curzon's viceroyalty marked a turning point in government education policy. He formally abandoned the doctrine that the state should not interfere in education. Instead, he was for a policy where the state could have the initiative to control a planned system from center. The picture changed entirely between 1902 and 1921, under the leadership given by Lord Curzon, the doctrine of state withdrawal was officially abandoned and it was held to be the duty of the state to look after education. In the later period the education was shifted to provinces, so central govt. had least control. The Sargeant Plan (1944) was an attempt on the part of the Government to devise and to enact remedial measures, which got attention only in the post – independence-era. Education in India was by and large unsatisfactory in the pre-

independence times. The number of universities in India was found to be insufficient when compared with other nations and there was prevalence of educated unemployment amongst the university graduates.

SECTION 1: HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

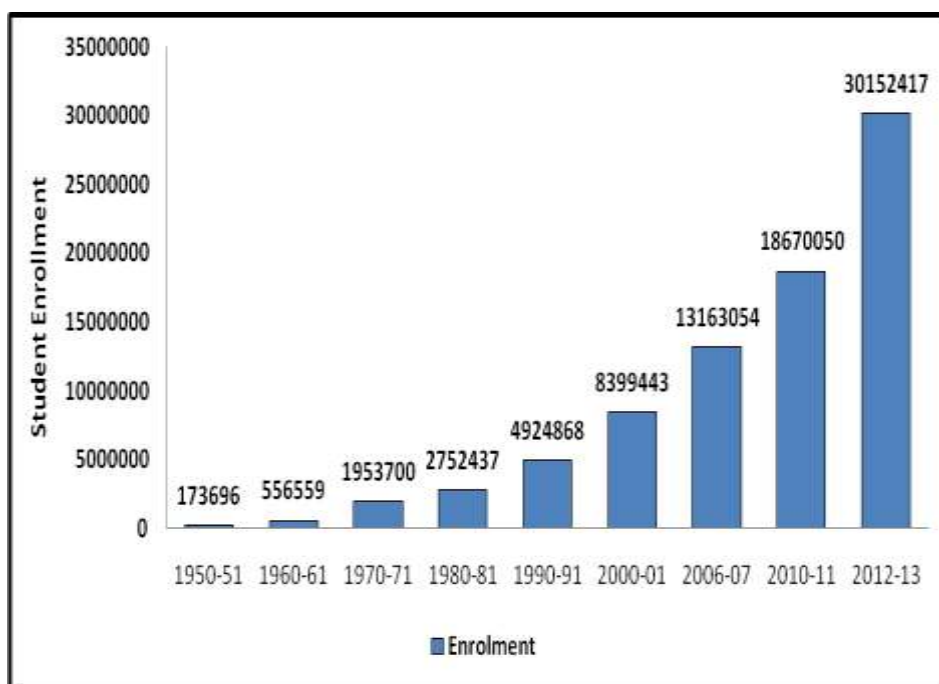
India made tremendous strides ever since the dawn of her independence in the field of higher education. Today, India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human creative and intellectual endeavors. In India, before independence the access to higher education was very limited, with enrolment of less than a million students in 500 colleges and 20 universities. But, after independence, there has been exponential increase in all these numbers. Now, it is a recorded fact that by the year 2012-13, there is an increase of 22 times in the number of Universities, 51 times increase in the number of colleges, and the students enrolment has gone up to over 100 times in the formal system of higher education as compared to the figures of Independent Year of India (see figures 1& 2). This growth in the Universities and Colleges was due to massive efforts and policy decisions were taken by the central government and the state government.

FIG. 1: Growth of higher education institutions in India (1951-13)



Despite this appreciable growth, the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education has grown to merely 12 percent, though it has grown from a meager level of 0.9 percent in 1951. The targets of raising GER to 15 percent by 2012 and 17 percent by 2020 brings in the issue of financing higher education.

FIG. 2: Growth of higher education enrolment in India (1951-13)



SECTION 3: INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC REFORMS

Education has been, traditionally, regarded as a social service in India. Since independence, a vast majority of higher education institutions have been established in the public sector in India. This tremendous growth of the Indian higher education has been by and large financed by the public sector till the eighties and the fees have not been enhanced for a long time. Consequent upon the financial constraints of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Economic reforms, more popularly known as Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation were introduced in India in the year 1991.

Consequent upon the inability of the Government to India to continue generously financing the higher education sector, it set up various committees and commissions, namely, Swaminadhan Committee, Punnaya Committee, Anandkrishan Committee, Ambani- Birla Committee, National Knowledge Commission, Yashpal Committee etc. All the committees recommended that higher education is gaining importance in the present times, therefore it needs to grow at a faster pace but public sector can't continue to contribute as largely (75 percent in 1986-87) as it had been doing in the past decades therefore (a) private sector should come forward and (b) user fees should be increased(c) non-governmental measures should be mobilized (d) scholarships and freeships should be enhanced for the economically weaker sections (e) availability of educational loans.

Liberalisation

These financial constraints of the Government of India compelled the Government of India to cut social sector spending including higher education and to shift the higher education from *merit goods* category to the *non – merit goods* category, as mentioned in the Discussion Paper on Subsidies (1997). Prior to it, the World Bank in its report *Higher Education: Lessons of Experience* (World Bank, 1994), had also projected higher education as a ‘non- merit good’ as against primary and secondary education which were classified as ‘merit goods’. Thus Government of India duplicated the World Bank’s thinking in the discussion paper *Government Subsidies in India* issued in May 1997 (Government of India, 1997). Education beyond elementary level was classified as non-merit good because here the benefits of subsidies accrue primarily to the recipients. Therefore, it was argued that the subsidy on higher education should be reduced from the existing 90 % to 25% over a period of five years. This concept was further expanded and its practical implications worked out in the *Ambani- Birla Report 2000* which was not accepted.

Given the serious resource crunch, surely the funds for expanding the higher education sector will not be forthcoming from the Central or State governments. A combination of unprecedented demand for access to higher education and the inability or unwillingness of Governments to provide the necessary support has brought the agenda of privatization of higher education to the forefront.

Privatisation

The ideology of privatization has contributed to the resurgence of private higher education. The establishment of private institutions is not a new phenomenon. It existed long before as mentioned earlier.

Actually, private colleges were very much there in Indian higher education scene. Today, they form about three-fourths of the total number of colleges which can be categorized as:- (a) *Aided Colleges*: which are privately managed and publicly funded colleges; (b) *Unaided Colleges*: which are managed as well as funded privately. The unaided colleges in India are the reflection of private enterprise and initiative. These self financing institutions in the private sector do not depend on government grants rather they recover their costs from students in the form of fees. Some covered this under the guise of capitation fees. Even though charging capitation fees is punishable under the law, the practice continues.

The number of private colleges has grown rapidly in the professional disciplines especially in the nineties and beyond. There has been spurt in the opening of private engineering, medical and management institutions/colleges under the name of self-financing or capitation-fee

colleges. Out of 16742 colleges in 31 states/U.Ts of the country (2003-04) the management status of these has been mentioned in the Table1. Not only professional disciplines but at some places even in humanities and social sciences, self-financing mode is adopted (Tilak, 2006). A few private institution of higher education have virtually been given university status and have been recognized as “deemed universities”. There are few private universities namely *MAHE*, *Amity Jaypee*, *Lovely Professional university* etc. The *Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University* has been created in Delhi which consists of private self-financing colleges only. A few other institutions, namely, *International Business Schools*, *Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIITs)* etc. are operating almost as universities or equivalent to universities offering degrees and diplomas.

These private or self financing universities charge high fees. Some of these institutions are charging even 50 percent of the recurring costs while CAGE committee (2005) had recommended that *user charges should not form more than 20 percent of the recurring cost of higher education*. Moreover, the proliferation of private sector higher education institutions in the professional courses likes engineering, medicine, nursing, hotel management etc. questions the relevance of the courses offered as large number of graduates are not being absorbed in the market i.e. prevalence of educated un employment.

Table - 1: Management wise distribution of colleges (2003-04)

MANAGEMENT BY	% AGE	NUMBER
1. Central Govt.	0	42
2. State Govt.	13	223
3. University Management	3	584
4. Local Bodies	7	1124
5. Private Aided	20	3312
6. Private Non-aided	38	6212
Information Not Available	19	3245
for		
Total Private College	57	9524
	Total	16742

Source: Directory of Colleges (2003-04), Vol. II, p. vii.

Globalisation

Given the excess demand for higher education in India, the foreign education providers, guided by market signals, began their operations. However, these market signals were not supported by government regulation. As a result, the provision of education services

by foreign universities were limited and remained mostly confined to the initiatives by private institutions in India. The UGC is now formulating a Model Act for Universities of the Twenty First Century in India, with the objective of promoting commercialization and corporation of higher education (University Grants Commission, 2003). Supply of education services by foreign institutions in partnership with the Indian institutions is making a visible presence in the higher education of India. There is high demand for the foreign education in India. However, the collaborative practices of foreign universities are mainly with private institutions in India. For a sustainable collaboration, it is necessary that public system of higher education in India develops the partnership with foreign universities.

CONCLUSION:

Indians have been considered to be the leaders as they gave the *numerical notation* to the world. The ancient Universities of Taxila, Nalanda etc. were famous the world over. During the British period, the higher education sector saw numerous phases of state support, its withdrawal, private initiatives, nationalism, CAGE etc. Higher education was acknowledged as the prime mover in independent India and was accorded generous state support, though private sector also continued to exist. Today it has grown into the third largest system in the world. The financial crunch faced by the Government of India in the early nineties necessitated the need for economic reforms, with a message that state cannot continue to fund higher education liberally thus inviting private sector in the higher education field. Moreover, Globalisation has set in new trends of collaborations with the foreign universities. All this has led to rise in the student fees. Both the developments pose danger to the issues of quality, inclusiveness and equity. In such a scenario, the role of regulatory bodies becomes more significant. There is strong need for setting up an educational ombudsman in order to achieve the threshold level of access ratio (i.e. 20%) without losing on the fronts of quality, equity and inclusiveness..

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